

Do you love me?

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[0 : 0 0] with me before we stand and sing to God's praise. We'll have the reading first. So we're going to turn to John. All our readings are in John, and we'll begin in John 13.

John 13, and just one verse to begin with. So John 13, verse 38. So John 13, verse 38. We're continuing in our series on the perseverance of a saint. That is how a Christian continues faithfully in the faith. And our first reading this evening is John 13, verse 38. We'll pick it up at verse 36, though, just to keep it in its context. Now hear God's word.

Simon Peter said to him, being Jesus, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterwards. Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times. I'd like to turn over to John 18.

And we're going to pick it up at verse 17. Actually, let's read from 15 through to the end of 27. That way we can keep in its context again.

I know it's a little longer than what I intended to read, but it is God's word after all. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, you also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not.

[2 : 2 9] Now the servants and the officials had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

The high priest then questioned Jesus, obeyed his disciples, and his teaching. Jesus answered him, if what I said to him, I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together, I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. They know what I said. When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, is that how you answer the high priest?

Jesus answered him, if what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? And I asked and sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, you also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, did I not see you in the garden with him? Peter again denied it, and at once the cock crowed. And finally, to John chapter 21, verse 15. This, of course, is after the resurrection. Jesus comes to the beach, and the disciples are out fishing.

[4 : 1 2] And verse 15 picks it up. When they had finished breakfast, he had cooked them breakfast on the beach, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, tend my sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything, and you know that I love you. And Jesus said to him, feed my sheep.

Well, may God bless both the reading of his word and the explanation in a moment. But before we get there, let's see all the readings. If you want to turn to one where we're going to be spending time, it will be the John 18 and the verses following, 17 through to 27. And then, of course, John 21,

verses 15 through to the end of 19. I'll be touching on 1 John 4 and other verses, but we'll do that as we go. I'd like to begin with an illustration in the same way that we did last week, where I began with the end of the sermon and then arrived at that same end. And I said that the church suffers, if you remember, under the same loss as does someone who has the latest high-tech mobile phone and yet can only do a couple of things on it, when the phone itself is capable so much more.

And so all of that other stuff becomes wasted on that person because they don't use it. It's there for them, but they don't use it, and how the church, unfortunately, suffers the same kind of waste, that it is multifaceted, that it is incredibly beautiful, and that it can do so much more than what we actually use it for. And so much of it goes wasted on the church because we do not function or use all of the church's functions. Well, this evening's message, again, is about persevering in the faith, continuing faithfully in the faith. And here's the illustration that will best suit what we're going to be addressing this evening. A husband and wife have been married for a number of years.

The husband decides, after a few years of marriage, that as he is out and about, he's no longer going to wear his wedding ring. He doesn't tell his wife this, but he goes to work, and the wedding ring comes off. And he goes out to other places where he's with his mates or whatever, and the wedding ring comes off. And later down the line, the wife finds out that this has been happening on quite a regular occasion. You know, the simple indentation of the ring and the wallet gives it away, or something like that. These little signs, the sort of, the fact that you've now not got a suntan line on your finger where you once had, all these little signs have just given away. And she says to him, rightly so, do you love me? Now, why would she ask that question? And why is it such a valid question? Why is it a question straight from the heart, a question that really addresses the issue? Why is it that her husband, who wants to appear single when he is married, evokes that question in his wife, do you love me? Well, you begin to understand immediately, hopefully, if you see the connection, that both love and identity is connected.

that the reason why it's a valid question is because the man is wanting to appear as though he is not something which he actually is. And so the question that follows is, well, do you then actually love me? And so we begin to see, just on a human level, that love and identity are so closely linked? They are bound together. And so it is no surprise at all that when Peter denies Jesus three times. And so it is, well, do you love me?

[9 : 35] And that's what we're going to be addressing this evening under this series heading of to persevere in the faith. And remember, to persevere in your faith, which is shorthand for distinguishing the difference between a genuine believer and a counterfeit believer. That's what theologians used that phrase is shorthand. How can we be sure that I am a real believer because I want the assurance that I am God's and going to be with him forever and ever in the new heavens and in the new earth? And how can I point out to my very lovely gran, who says, well, I'm a good person and God will accept me into his heaven, that actually that that is a counterfeit belief. And it is not a true definition of persevering in the faith. And so while I'm not judging that person that they're wrong, I do want to get to a point of clarity lest that person believes the wrong things and ends up, therefore, in the wrong place. Belief matters. And it's not enough, is it, just to say that I believe in Jesus. It's not enough to say that. Remember what James says, even the devils, demons believe and shudder. And that's really not the kind of company that you want to be keeping. That's not the kind of group of friends that you want to be known with, people who simply believe. So perseverance has to involve far more than simply a mental ascent of, I believe, and it has to involve more than simply a statement that says, I believe, especially if it's only in the context of a gathering like this.

So this evening, we're going to focus on the importance of love and identity in continuing in the faith faithfully. Now, most of you will know how hard it is to continue to do something when you don't love what you do, when you don't do it. As you know, my wife is away at her parents with the five children, and my wife with the children skyped the other day and says, look, you've got no children around. It's sunny. You can cut the grass. And I said, I think our connection's breaking up. And I said, what was that? Sit down and rest? Okay. I don't love cutting the grass. In fact, I positively hate cutting the grass. And so the grass is uncut. Now, this isn't going to make me popular, but it's extremely difficult to do anything that you don't like doing. It's extremely difficult to do anything you don't enjoy and you don't love. And so you ought to begin to understand, at least at a very tipping point, that if you don't love Jesus, that it's going to be incredibly difficult to follow him.

If you don't love Jesus, and I mean truly love Jesus, it's going to be really difficult to follow his commands. Love is the very foundation and the sort of grease that makes those cogs turn. And so without love for Jesus, without love for God, guess what? You're just not going to do it. It's just not going to happen because we are built to function, to do the things that we love, to do the things that we enjoy, to do the things that we have great joy about. In fact, one of the gifts of the Spirit, or in fact, two gifts of the Spirit, the first two is love and joy.

[13 : 40] And the reason why the Spirit has to give us these gifts is because he knows that they are necessary for following Jesus, that love and joy in Christ is absolutely basic for doing what Jesus wants us to do, for even praying for his will to be done in our life and not our own, even to follow his commandments, even to believe properly, even to worship properly. Without love, without joy, it's just not going to happen.

And so turning away from Jesus, if you do turn away from Jesus, where you have that morning moment where you wake up and you can't quite decide whether or not you want to be like Jesus today or not, and you get up without any thought or commitment or contemplation or devotion towards God whatsoever, and you just get on with the rest of your day. And you know that you've done it because there's just that niggles that says you're sort of running ahead of me. There's no time in prayer, no time in devotion.

There's just you've left the house. Imagine if I left the house without speaking to my wife every single day. Well, what happens when a Christian does that with Jesus every single day? You leave, you get up and you go, and there's not that. And so turning away from Jesus is not like turning away from being a supporter of something. You know, so you're a supporter of a football team, and you turn away from being a supporter. Well, turning away from Jesus is not like being a supporter. It would be the equivalent of a bride turning away from her husband. So now we begin to understand the setting because the setting is love. The setting is identity. You are the bride of Christ. And so to turn away, it's not a case of just not paying attention and not supporting your favorite whatever. It is actually the fact that you're, the bride is not paying any attention to the future husband that she's going to marry. We are, the church is the bride of Christ. And so these are issues of deep emotion, of deep love and deep identity. Do you recognize that you're the bride? And so now do you begin to understand that it could be the bride who's taking her wedding ring off and not the husband? It is Christ who gives us a new identity, and it is Christ who even gives us the ability to be able to love him so that we can continue in the faith faithfully.

And the way that we continue in the faith faithfully, according to these passages here, is not to deny Jesus. Is not to deny Jesus. Let me try and illustrate this. When children ignore their parents, when they're out with their friends, you know, you've got mum and dad walking through a shopping centre, and their parents are of, let's, and the children of, let's say, of teenage age, and they're walking through the same shopping centre, and hey-ho, they see their parents, and they either decide to ignore them, or they meet them, and then they pretend to be cool in front of their friends. They end up being less polite to their own parents than what their friends are. The world would tell us, this is normal. This is just what it is to be a teenager. Well, the world has got it, unfortunately, incredibly wrong. What the child is actually doing, though the child wouldn't explain it in that way, is denying their identity with their parents. They're trying to pull away, and I'm my own person, and okay, it may be normal, but it's normal in the sense that it's, it's full of normalness. It's not the kind of normalness that God approves of. It's the very thing that, why are you embarrassed? Well, you say, well, it's just teenage. I sort of like it that age. Well, it may be, but it's not right. The trouble is, however, that type of behaviour makes its way all the way through, even into the Christian life, where a full-grown man who's been with Jesus for three years can start behaving just like that. I mean, isn't that what Peter does?

[18 : 22] Isn't that how he actually denies Jesus? And aren't we actually capable of doing the same thing? In other words, we're, we're not doing anything different than what teenagers do with their parents. Well, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm going to separate myself from this. And so we begin to see, or at least touch on it, the tension of loving and identity and following Jesus, how all of these are wrapped up in one sphere. And we especially see that in the life of Peter. Peter is told by Jesus, and Peter really gets the brunt of it, doesn't he? He was the first one to walk on water, you know, of the disciples.

He was the first one to say, Jesus is the Christ. And Jesus, in Mark 8, you'll remember, turns around and says, get behind me, Satan. I mean, you know, Peter really gets it kind of rough, but

he's the first one out and the first one to stumble. But nevertheless, he, by God's grace, gets back up. Jesus prays for him. Well, here, he basically says to Jesus, you know, I will follow you, I will lay down my life for you. And Jesus says, well, will you lay down your life for me? And then Jesus says this to him, you'll deny me three times before the cock crows. Later on, after the resurrection, Jesus is making this breakfast on the beach. And for the second time, he has to call Peter away from his occupational tie of fishing. But the question remains, how exactly did Peter deny Jesus? Because not once, not once, did Peter ever say, I deny Jesus. He never said, I deny Jesus. He never even said, I deny knowing Jesus.

He never even says, I deny who Jesus is. I deny his deity. I deny his... Not once did you ever hear him say that. And so, in what way did Peter deny Jesus if he didn't deny Jesus in those ways? And why is it that if he didn't deny Jesus in those ways, that Jesus still considers it as a denial of him? Well, back in John 13, 36 to 38, Peter really wants to follow Jesus, says to Jesus, I will lay down my life for you. Jesus then turn that into the question of, well, will you really? And then he lays on Peter's heart a truth. And the truth is, the fact of the matter is, Peter, that you're going to deny me three times before the cock crows. Imagine being told that. That here you are explaining your love for Jesus, saying that you'll lay down your life for Jesus. And Jesus turns around, who knows you better than you know yourself, and says, actually, Peter, you've got a wrong picture here. The truth of the matter is, you're actually going to deny me. You're not actually going to lay down your life for me. You're actually going to deny me. Our church history does tell us, and Jesus says at the end of John 21, that Peter is going to die a death for Christ. And church historians actually tell us that Peter was crucified upside down, because he didn't consider it worthy enough to be crucified in the same way that Christ was. So it was true, but at one point he did lay down his life, but before he got there, he denied Jesus. And because he didn't say those words, I deny him, or I deny knowing him, or I deny his deity, and yet Jesus is adamant that Peter will deny him, then that means there must be another way of denying Jesus than just saying, I deny Jesus.

[22 : 21] There must be another way of doing it. So just read with me, if you will, John 18, and we'll begin at verse 17. John 18, verse 17, the servant girl at the door said to Peter, You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? And he said, I am not. That's the first denial.

Here's the second denial, verse 25. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself, so they said to him, You also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not. That's the second time.

The third time. The third time, a servant recognizes him from the garden where Peter had cut off that man's ear, and this servant said to Peter, verse 26, Did I not see you in the garden with him? Verse 27, Peter again denied it, and it once the rooster crowed. The third denial of Jesus.

But you'll notice, or at least you should have noticed as you've read it through this second time, that Peter is denying to be a disciple.

He doesn't say, I deny Jesus. He says, verse 17, I am not. In other words, I'm not a disciple. Peter denies his identity with Christ as a follower, as a disciple. Verse 25, Peter again denies that he is a disciple.

[24 : 04] Verse 26 and 27, Peter again denies that he was with Jesus, again denying that he is a disciple. Peter doesn't deny Jesus, doesn't deny his deity, doesn't deny him as a person.

What Peter denies is that he is a disciple, that he is a follower. But according to Jesus, that if you deny that you're a disciple, you are denying Jesus.

Okay? If you deny that you are a disciple, if you deny that your identity is with Christ, then you are denying Christ himself.

So now we begin to see how serious this is. Now we begin to see that love and unity and identity matters. That for me to take my wedding ring off and prance around town as though I was a single man person isn't just for me to deny that I am married, but it would be for me to deny my actual wife. That's what Peter is saying. Sorry, that's what Jesus is saying, that when Peter denies his discipleship, denies his identity as a follower of me, he's actually denying me. So this idea that you can have a Christian identity in here as we gather in church and somehow have a different identity out in the world, whatever the reasons are, either fear or professionalism or family or friends, that you are one person in here and one person out there. You're not just denying that you're a Christian.

[25 : 55] You're not just wanting that, you're not just according to Jesus coming across as if you're not a follower, not a disciple, but you're actually denying Christ himself. That's what Peter is doing.

He's not denying Christ, he's denying his following status. He's denying his identity as a disciple, and Jesus says, that is what it means to deny me.

And so we can't leave our identity in the house when we go out to work. We can't leave our identity in the church when we leave the church building. We can't leave our identity behind.

In fact, the law, as in the law, have got big, big problems with this because you've got big multinational companies that want people to deny who they are.

So you get a company like a company that bakes cakes for weddings, or you get a company that sort of takes photographs at weddings.

[26 : 58] And let's just say that you are a Christian photographer, and you've been asked by this company that you're to go and take a photograph of this so-called wedding, and it just so happens to be two people of the same sex.

And you say to them, well, I can't do that. And so it's the company's policy that we don't actually make distinctions. And you say, well, actually, I don't recognize it as marriage, as God defines it, and therefore I don't want to do it.

What the company is expecting you to do is it's not just a choice about keeping your job anymore. The real choice is which identity are you going to choose.

Are you going to leave your identity at the door when you came out of your house that morning to go to work and deny who you are? Or are you actually going to follow it through? And the trouble is the law courts don't know what to do with this because what they're effectively saying is it's all right for the company who's made up of individuals to say what their identity is.

But you have to deny yours when you work for me? You can see the problem. And so what we have here is that there are only two identities found in Scripture.

[28 : 12] You are either in Adam or you are in Christ. There's no other scenario. This is why to be unequally yoked is so incredibly serious because it is a denial of your identity.

It is to take your real identity of being with Christ and to then identify yourself with another person. You can't do that. Jesus says that to separate yourself from me and say, I'm not with them but I'm actually with you.

Peter actually gets himself into all sorts of trouble in Galatians 2. You'll remember that he's eating at the table of the Gentiles and then the Jews come along and he says, well, I'm going to swap tables. And Paul comes along to him and sort of tackles him out in public because the sin is out in public and he's accusing Peter of denying the reality of the gospel.

It's not just a question of table fellowship. It is actually a question of identity and gospel reality, which Peter is again denying.

[29 : 24] So these aren't small issues. I understand that there are issues that are not well thought through and so people can end up making decisions thinking that there's actually nothing there more to it.

But actually it's far greater than that because love for Jesus and identity with Jesus is closely connected. Now why is this the case?

Well, in 1 John 4, 7, we are told that love is from God. That's where it comes from. If you want to love, if you need love and you need to pass that love on, then there is a source, an eternal source, and the source is God.

Then in verses 15 through to 17 in 1 John 4, this is how love is perfected in a believer. It is perfected by us confessing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, confessing him, Psalm 2, as our King, the ruler of everything, and by abiding in him.

And therefore, if you deny your confession, if you deny your abiding, if you deny your allegiance, if you deny your identity as a follower, as a disciple, according to John as well, you're actually denying your confession because it's by abiding you hold your confession true.

[30 : 48] Everything begins to unravel so very, very quickly. And so it is no surprise at all that the very first question that Jesus asks Peter, the very first question that Jesus asked Peter after the resurrection, at this moment in John 21, for after the second time Peter is called, caught a large amount of fish, for the second time that he has to be called away from fishing.

It's a bit like *deja vu*, and I'm sure that many Christians in this building experience exactly the same thing. Imagine it for a moment. For the second time, Jesus comes looking for Peter to call him as a disciple.

For the second time, he has to leave his occupational tie of fishing. For the second time, he's caught a large amount of fish. It's like *deja vu*. It's like, I'm back to the beginning again. Have I learnt nothing? And the first question Jesus asks him is, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

I think it's very important. Not, Simon, do you love me? But the first question is, Simon, do you love me more than these? Or more than anything else?

[32 : 09] More than the other disciples? More than your, more than the fish that you have caught? More than your occupational tie? Do you love me more than these? Am I going to be your identity?

Am I going to be the one that you are going to be with forever and ever? That's what Jesus is asking Peter. And Peter says, Lord, you know that I love you.

And Jesus says, feed my sheep. Now, this is where I want us to be a little bit careful, listen carefully, that is, and understand the distinction between what love leads to and what love is. So, when Jesus says to Peter, do you love me? And then says, feed my sheep. We ought to understand that that's what love leads to.

When Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments, you ought to understand that keeping the commandments is a reaction or an action to loving Jesus.

[33 : 10] It doesn't mean that you love Jesus. Okay? If you're keeping his commandments, it proves that you love him, but you're not loving him only by keeping his commandments. Jesus is saying, if you love me, okay, that exists first.

Then, go and keep my commandments. So, how do you love Jesus? Because many of us would answer that question of, well, you keep his commandments. No. That's what loving Jesus leads to. If you love me, then keep my commandments. But when we speak, well, do you love Jesus? Well, how do you know that you love Jesus? Well, I keep my commandments. No. Now, how do you love Jesus?

That's what your love for Jesus will lead to. That's the way that it will turn up in the world. But how do you love Jesus in the beginning? How do you actually love Jesus?

Well, I love Jesus by keeping his commandments. No. Keeping his commandments is showing Jesus that you love him. But how do you actually love him in the first place?

[34 : 13] Love leads to an action. But love for Jesus exists even before the action begins. So, what does it mean to love Jesus? What does that actually mean?

When Jesus says, Do you love me? What is Jesus getting at? What does Jesus want to hear from you when he asks you the question, Do you love me?

Do you love me more than these? He's asking for one thing. Or he's wanting one response from you. And that is, Are you with me?

Or are you against me? Do you want me more than anything else? Is your confession, 1 John 4, for me before anything else?

Do you want to abide in me? Do you want to identify yourself with me? That's what Jesus is looking for.

[35 : 20] Jesus is looking to see if Peter will identify himself with Jesus more than anything else. And so, remember the illustration. A young couple get married and after a few years, the man is taking off his wedding ring.

Well, let's reverse the illustration. Now the bride is taking off her wedding ring. Are they going to get married? The illustration falls down because the bride wouldn't necessarily have a wedding ring before the wedding day.

And the wife calls into question, let's say it's the man that's done it, because he wants to be identified as a single person rather than a married person. And she says to him, Well, do you love me? Or do you love me?

What is she asking for? And why is the question from the heart and not from the head? Why does it make so much sense? Well, it makes so much sense because we all understand, all of us sitting here know deep within our heart that love and identity are connected.

Closely connected. What she is asking when she says, Do you love me? Is, Do you really want to be with me? Do you really want me?

[36 : 37] Because the impression that I get when you take off your wedding ring and wander around town as though you're single when you're actually married is to give the impression that you don't want me.

And therefore, by denying our marriage, you're denying me. And so we begin to see, hopefully, that love and identity, they are closely connected.

Well, let's bring this to a conclusion then. To persevere in our faith, to continue faithfully in the faith, is to not deny Jesus.

And the way to not deny Jesus is to not deny your identity in thought, in word, and in deed. To not deny Jesus in thought, word, and deed has many applications.

It could be that you lose your job over it because you are unwilling to identify yourself with another group rather than Christ. It could mean that certain things begin or certain things end.

[37 : 42] But what happens is you are preserving your identity as a follower of Christ. That's how you persevere in the faith faithfully, by preserving your identity as a follower of Christ.

Do you love me more than these? Peter is not allowed to come up with his own way of following Jesus. Peter is not allowed to come up with his own way of defining what it means to love Jesus. And yet, many in the church will say, well, I love Jesus in this way. And this is how I show my love for Jesus. And this is how I do it. Well, I don't think Jesus is all too concerned with the way you do it, other than the concern may be wrong.

He wants to know, do you love me more than these? When we persevere in the faith faithfully, we are following somebody else's way.

We're doing it their way and not our own. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. And he's not talking about a direction. In other words, follow me, you'll get to go in the right direction, though that is true.

[38 : 50] What Jesus is really getting at is, I am the way. Not, I can get you in the way, not that I can point you in the right direction, but I am the actual way and that by being in me, by abiding in me, you will then end up, you will then end up where I am because I am the way.

That's how you get to where I'm going. And so to follow Jesus is not to follow behind him like follow my leader. To follow Jesus is to be in Christ that wherever he walks, we go with him.

It's about abiding. It's about not denying our essential identity that we are no longer in Adam, but in Christ. He's speaking about union.

And so in the same way, marriage is about love and identity. You are no longer two but one. You're no longer two but one. So too is a true relationship with Christ that you're no longer an individual person but one with Christ.

And this is the identity that Christ does not want us deny, to deny, lest we end up living the type of Christian life where Jesus is meeting us every morning and he's saying to us, do you love me more than these?

[40 : 11] And we're constantly going back to the things that we were in before, like Peter. Don't you find it interesting that at the end of the gospel where Jesus calls Peter is almost identical where Jesus calls Peter at the beginning of the gospel?

and he sort of goes back as it were to start all over again. And the fundamental question which begins the first step, the first right step is do you love me?

Do you love me more than anything else? Because love for Christ defines our identity in Christ. Amen.